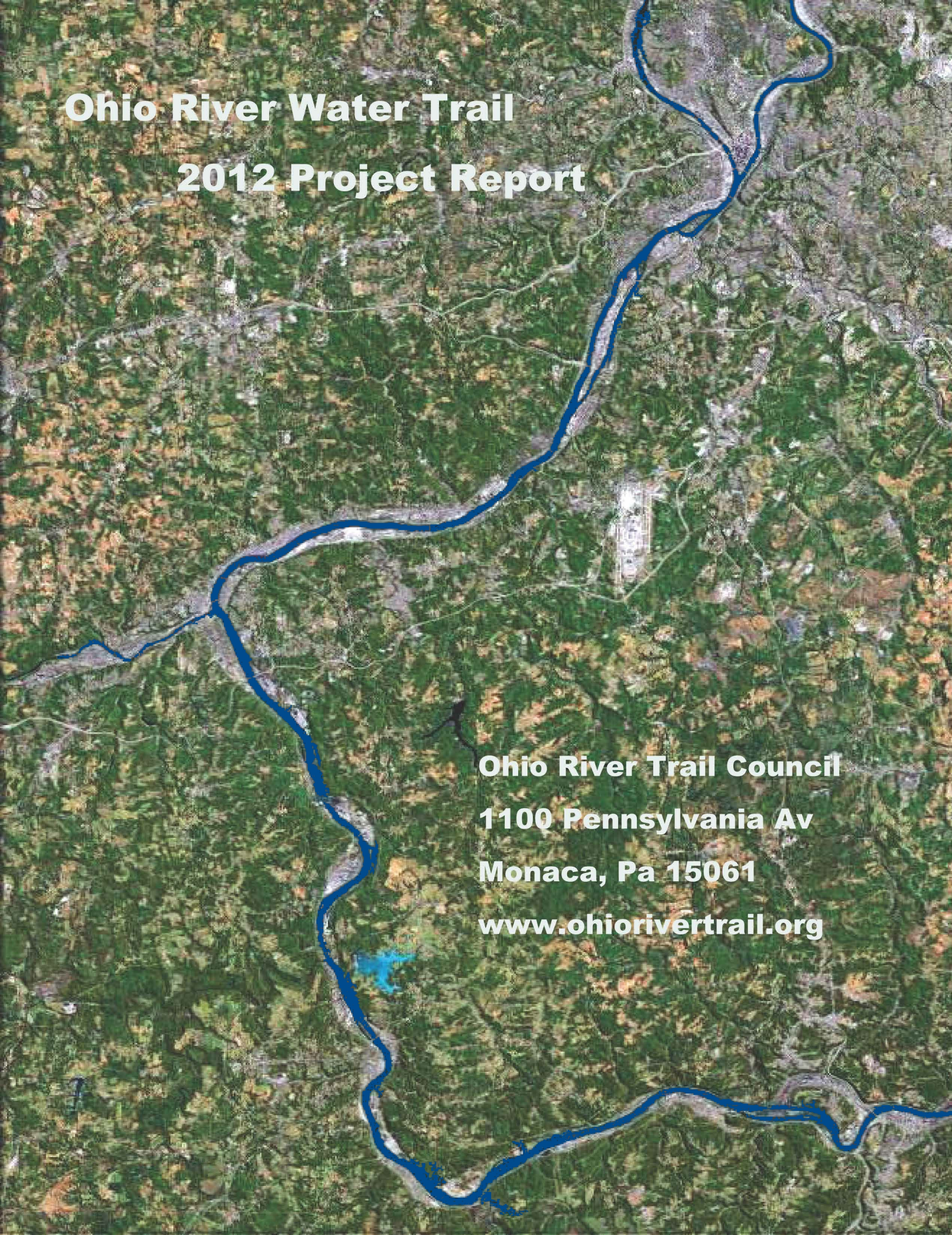
Ohio River Water Trail

2012 Project Report



Ohio River Trail Council

1100 Pennsylvania Av

Monaca, Pa 15061

www.ohiorivertrail.org

1100 Pennsylvania Av
Monaca, Pa 15061
www.ohiorivertrail.org

Phone: 724.728.2625
Fax: 724.775.9876
drvtroia@ohiorivertrail.org

Ohio River Trail Council

"Joining communities through fitness, recreation, heritage and transportation networks"

August 7, 2012

Mr. James R. McCarville, Executive Director
Port of Pittsburgh Commission
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2990
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Re: Ohio River Trail Council (vendor #765870) - *Upper Ohio River Water Trail*

Dear Mr. McCarville,

The Travel Industry Association of America reports that 55.1 million Americans are "Geotourists" interested in eco-tourism, including activities like kayaking and canoeing. Paddling is one of the top ten adventure activities for baby boomers, followed by fishing, biking and hiking. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, 17.8-million Americans participated in kayaking, canoeing and rafting in 2008, with 7.8 million paddling kayaks alone. Involvement in the sport has nearly doubled in the United States in the last nine years, according to the National Sporting Goods Association. Paddling is the fastest growing outdoor sport nationally and is among the top five recreational sports that had the most first-time participants in Pennsylvania.

Southwestern Pennsylvania is experiencing a rapid growth in interest and use of our scenic rivers. To address this growing appeal and introduce our citizens to the recreational and environmental renewal of the Ohio River, the Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) proposed the development of a water trail, the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail,* along the Ohio River and its tributaries in Allegheny and Beaver Counties.

A water trail or blue trail is a dedicated safe route for boats that provides a destination for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and other recreation. These routes establish recreational corridors between specific locations and can include boat launches, day-use sites, and in some cases overnight camping. Equally important, the safe access to our waterways and the resulting enhanced river experiences will inspire stewardship for the river and its associated landscape, including its cherished scenery and significant natural and cultural resource.

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The *Upper Ohio River Water Trail,* which is a blueway that parallels the planned Ohio River Trail greenway, will enhance the recreational activities on 40+ miles of the Ohio River and connect Pittsburgh to its neighboring communities in Beaver County while offering enormous opportunity for recreation for the 1.4 million residents living along the Ohio River. Connecting neighborhoods and communities along the riverfronts offers immense opportunity for increased ecotourism and alternative transportation throughout the southwest Pennsylvania region.

A highlight of the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail* Project is the development of the ORTC Youth Paddling Club. Water trails link families who grow together through work and play on the trail. The ORTC Youth Paddling Program includes teaching Paddlesports Safety and Paddlecraft Vessel Safety to children as well as training community members to be safe boaters, and guiding public paddling trips. On July 7, 2011, the ORTC collaborated with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Auxiliary to sponsor the USCG Auxiliary Paddlesports America Safety Course a four-hour education teaching Paddlesports safety and Paddlecraft Vessel Safety. The ORTC Community Day, which occurred on July 17, 2011, featured free kayak use and beginner instruction for participants.

The *Upper Ohio River Water Trail* specifically provides for the expansion of canoe, kayak and rowing access along our rivers by establishing a series of small watercraft launch points along the Ohio River and its tributaries in Pennsylvania. The council supports the design, construction, installation and the improvement of small watercraft launch sites with kayak/canoe storage racks and other amenities including directional and safety signage, picnic tables, benches and bike racks. The racks are especially useful for storing bikes and kayaks during Pedal & Paddle excursions.

These waterway improvements and enhancements will permit the ORTC to gain an official state designation for the *Ohio River Water Trail* as a *Pennsylvania Water Trail* by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. Next, the ORTC will then seek designation of the entire Upper Ohio River in Pennsylvania as a *National Recreation Trail* and its inclusion into the *National Water Trail* System, from Pittsburgh downstream to the WV/OH line.

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Thanks to the Port of Pittsburgh Commission, the development of a water trail system along the Ohio River and its tributaries is becoming a reality. The Ohio River Water Trail Project began with a Port of Pittsburgh Commission $10,000 grant (#4100053655) and a second $10,000 Port of Pittsburgh Commission Grant (#4100056363) a year later. With this funding, the Ohio River Trail Council is forging additional partnerships with local and national groups to promote river utilization and community pride.

The Ohio River Water Trail Project has recently formed a Steering Committee to provide guidance in the development of the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail.* The Steering Committee includes representatives from the Ohio River Trail Council, National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, Beaver County Planning Commission, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Independence Conservancy, Beaver County Historical Research and Landmarks Foundation, Beaver County Rowing Association, Beaver County Recreation & Tourism Department, Beaver County YMCA, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife Service's Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge, and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission.

The first assembly of the Steering Committee occurred on Monday June 11, 2012. Municipality representatives were welcomed and encouraged to attend. The Ohio River Trail Council will be hosting open houses and public meetings as the project moves forward to promote public awareness and encourage community input.

The investment in the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail* - Pennsylvania section through sponsorship and in-kind services to-date totals to nearly $50,000 primarily from the Port of Pittsburgh Commission (PPC) and the U.S. Department of Interior National Park Service's Challenge Cost Share Program Grant (CCSP). The source of the Upper Ohio River Water Trail funding includes a total of $20,000 in grants from the Port of Pittsburgh Commission, a $9900 NPS Challenge Cost Share Program grant, and about $18,000 of in-kind and volunteer services by the ORTC, local community and organizational partners.

In summary, the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail Project* includes four deliverables:

1) the installation of amenities along various small watercraft launch sites along the Ohio River and its tributaries, such as roadside directional signage, waterway signage, informational kiosks, picnic tables, benches, canoe/kayak racks and bike racks;

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2) a water trail map & guide which includes the identification of access and hazard sites, trail amenities, safety information, boating regulations, and information on natural, cultural and historic points of interest;

3) the purchase of canoes and kayaks for use in the ORTC Youth Paddling Program and partner organizations; and

4) application for designation of the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail* as part of the *Pennsylvania Water Trail Program, National Recreation Trail,* and as part of the *National Water Trail System*. The ORTC goal is to complete the above aspects of the *Upper Ohio River Water Trail Project* by next year.

Blue trails provide a fun and exciting way for us all to discover our rivers, connect to the great outdoors, celebrate the beauty of our region, and improve our quality of life. Water trails connect museums, historic sites, parks and preserves creating frontiers for exploration, discovery and enrichment. These connections ultimately build a sense of place and community.

Please refer to Appendix I for photos of accomplishments to date.

Respectfully submitted,

Vincent Troia

Vincent Troia, CEO
Ohio River Trail Council

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Appendix A

ORTC Youth Kayaking Club - Little Beaver Creek, ORTC Community Day July 17, 2011

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Bridgewater, Pa - Ohio River Bridgewater Crossings Bike Rack

Bridgewater, Pa - Beaver River Beach Launch Kayak Rack

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Bridgewater, Pa - Beaver River Beach Launch Safe Paddling Tips Sign

Rochester, Pa - Ohio River Riverfront Park Bike Rack

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Rochester, Pa - Ohio River Ramp Launch Kayak Rack

Rochester, Pa - Ohio River Safe Paddling Tips Sign

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Monaca, Pa - Ohio River Riverfront Park Bike Rack

Monaca, Pa - Ohio River Ramp Launch Kayak Rack

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Monaca, Pa - Ohio River Ramp Launch Kayak Rack & Safe Paddling Tips

Ohioville, Pa – Ohioville Lock 57 Community Park Kayak & Bike Rack

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Ohioville, Pa - Ohioville Lock 57 Community Park Safe Paddling Tips Sign